

and I think all Americans need to urge him to follow through on that veto.

I think it is worth it to really focus on the facts on this issue. I am going to talk about three facts and just go through them very clearly, very specifically, because this is a case that the more that the American people know about what the Republican majority is doing to Medicare, the more disturbing, the more distressing that it is.

It is truly as bad as people's worst nightmare in this country. The first thing is this whole debate has started because my Republican colleagues say Medicare is going bankrupt in 7 years. We have to do something to save Medicare. It is going bankrupt in 7 years.

Well, one of the things that this chart points out, and this I think really says it in black and white, is if you look at the 30 years that Medicare has existed, 12 of those 30 years Medicare had an actuarial life less than what it has today. In fact, in several years it had only a 2-year actuarial life. What Congress has done is made adjustments to the Medicare system like any health care insurance program, which is what Medicare is, and has made adjustments to correct those actuarial deficiencies.

So the first big flat out lie that my Republican colleagues have made in this legislation is this is unprecedented. That is just not the case.

The second flat out lie that they have made is that it requires \$270 billion to correct. Where did the \$270 billion number come from? There are actuarial, nonpolitical, technical people whom evaluate the solvency of the Medicare program. No one has come up with any numbers anywhere near \$270 billion. Where did that number come from?

Where it came from, it was a derived number from the budget process. The Republicans, as they were drawing up their budget, came up with a hole of \$270 billion. And the only place that they went to, they could have gone to Social Security, but they were a little bit more fearful of that, they went to Medicare for a \$270 billion gap to fill the hole.

What is in that hole? Well, there is a variety of things in that hole, including a military budget above what the President has requested and what the Joint Chiefs of Staff and divisions of different branches of the military has requested. But they are also including tax breaks of the worst kind that are outrageous from this government's and from the people of this country's perspective.

Special interests at the worst level; it is a list that gets longer and longer. Who did what for who? College football coaches, convenience stores, certain specific companies get tax breaks in this legislation, on the backs of 36 million Medicare recipients, who worked hard and played by the rules, and yet if this legislation passes and is not vetoed, would in fact occur.

So that is the second big lie, which is a \$270 billion number. And the third

and final big lie that I will mention is this whole idea of choice. My Republican colleagues consistently say that the Medicare proposal that they pass, and they will pass again this week, provides choice. They continuously say it provides choice for Medicare recipients.

What it provides is a false choice. It provides a false choice, because what will inevitably happen, and this legislation is set up to make this happen, is that for anyone who remains in traditional Medicare, the out-of-pocket costs will be astronomical, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8,000 a year for seniors. To put it in perspective, 75 percent of the seniors in this country, their income is less than \$25,000 a year, so we are talking about \$4,000 out-of-pocket for someone in that category. It just does not work.

□ 1845

So what will end up inevitably happening is that 90-plus percent of seniors will be forced into substandard HMO's. I urge everyone to both write their Senators and urge the President to veto this legislation.

AN INCREASE TO MINIMUM WAGE WILL LIST WORKERS OUT OF POVERTY AND OFF WELFARE

THE SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas, Mr. GENE GREEN, is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. GENE GREEN of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I rise tonight in support of the minimum wage increase, and later this evening the gentleman from New York, MAJOR OWENS, has organized a special order in support of the minimum wage. I join my colleagues from the Committee on Economic and Educational Opportunities in my support for an increase in the minimum wage. Fifty seven years ago today the Congress first approved a minimum wage of 25 cents.

This anniversary finds us with mixed emotions. On the one hand, we are thankful that the Congress recognized the need to guarantee a livable wage. On the other hand, we recognize that millions of people earn at or below the minimum wage and that the last increase in the minimum wage occurred on April 1, 1991. As if this was not enough, the real value of the minimum wage has been on a fairly steady decline for the past 15 years. Today, the minimum wage has fallen 45 cents in real value since its 1991 increase. I am afraid that if the majority party has its way, we may never see an increase in the minimum wage.

Many people, writing or speaking on either side of this issue, quote from 57 years of studies on how the increase of the minimum wage affects employment, wages and the economy. There are studies on both sides.

My contention is we should base the argument on the facts and not theory. Based on my experience, real life is never constant nor completely equal.

First, the idea that an increase in the minimum wage could lead to increased numbers of welfare recipients is simply not correct. In fact, the opposite is true. Today, a full-time minimum wage worker is paid \$8,800 a year.

The U.S. Census reports that the average family in my Houston district is 3.2 people. According to the census guidelines published in the Federal Register [February 9, 1995], the 1995 Federal poverty level for a family of three is \$12,590. Using these facts, the math is simple. A full-time minimum wage worker supporting a family of three will make almost \$4,000 less than the Federal poverty level.

However, with an increase in the minimum wage to \$5.15, and figuring in their maximum earned income tax credit, which was passed by the Democratic Congress, this same family would be \$1,500 above the poverty rate and off welfare. Let me repeat that. Off welfare.

It is also argued that the minimum wage is a wage for lower- to middle-class teenagers and is, therefore, an entry level wage. While this may have been so in years past, the Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that more than 4 million Americans earn at or below the minimum wage. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, current minimum-wage earners are two-thirds adult, with over 50 percent being 26 or older, while 62 percent are women. The minimum wage is no longer just for teenagers.

Finally, the argument is made that raising the minimum wage would lead many employers to use more efficient machines, to relocate their factories, or to use part-time and temporary workers. Statistics show that minimum-wage earners, due to their lack of skills, work harder and longer hours to compensate for that shortcoming. I am not advocating the position that employers are unfeeling, but we must all face the fact that most employers, with some exceptions, are driven by the bottom line and not the betterment of society.

One recent study between New Jersey, which raised their minimum wage, and Pennsylvania, which did not, showed no job loss and only a very slight increase in the cost of a fast food meal. I find it very confusing when the majority argues the minimum wage increase will cause job loss by increasing or continuing farm subsidies is never given to the same rhetoric. Both the farm subsidies and the minimum wage provide a level at which the producer, either farm produce or labor, can earn a profit.

Americans need an increase in the minimum wage, because it will lift them out of poverty, it will give them a living wage, but more importantly, it will get them off of welfare. Instead of concentrating all of their efforts on tax-cuts for the wealthy, the majority should act to provide a minimum wage that will lift workers out of poverty and off the welfare rolls.